



A Collaborative Syllabus on Kinship: Feminist Theories of Race & Reproduction

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ABSTRACT

This syllabus centers on the lived concept of kinship. We have developed this collaborative syllabus together in our Kin: Race & Reproduction graduate seminar as a living archive and demonstration of what can emerge from an intentional classroom experience. We are all graduate student scholars and have been able to cultivate a mode of kinship through meaningful discussions; our work and the syllabus we have put forth here is the product of our building community in this space. We view kinship not only as a theoretical concept but a praxis of care that when practiced in the classroom allows students to bring their whole selves into the space, forging meaningful relationships and an intimate engagement with the class readings and assignments. By this we mean to invite students to incorporate their personal experiences, whether it be regarding how they feel about the course materials or applying theory to their everyday lives. The articles and essays appearing before this syllabus are the product of this intentional engagement and kinship positionality.

Through our collaboration, we aim to illustrate how kinship offers a way of navigating the world as an individual and within a community. Through our curated questions, selected readings, and our own experiences reflecting on these themes, our hope is for other students to grapple with the profound ways kinship and relationality shape our lives in both intimate and structural ways. In moving through the syllabus, we begin with large-scale forms of connection, focusing on ecological kinship and community, political structures governing kinship, and the theorizing of experiencing kinship as a spatial, temporal, and material phenomenon before moving into sections which ground these approaches through grounded explorations of intimacy, performance, familial construction, and resistance as opportunities through which to explore how kinship formations shape and inform the everyday, and what our understandings of kinship can mean for moving towards a more relational and communal mode of being-together.

Each theme can be taught as a class on its own, as a sub-section in part of a larger syllabus or combined and extended based on what desire one has for a seminar learning outcome. We must emphasize that this syllabus is unbounded, as mentioned prior, because every theme is entangled in the broader, overall concept of Kinship.

REFLECTION



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Contributors: Justice Madden and Logan Layne

Understanding nourishment versus consumption in an essential mode for individual sovereignty and building collective communities. Ordinarily, when we look at an essential need we look at production and exploitation. An example of that is addressing food, hunger, and the rights of land. This section seeks to reframe black kinship and ancestral ties to the land with the healing perspective positing narratives from farmers, scholars and chefs who explore food, land, and kinship as intrinsic modes of healing. The landscape of examining food geographies and histories provide a generative insight on ways kinship and natural relations have alienated individuals and communities but also provide a remedy for self-reliance outside modes of violent, oppressive systems. These readings primarily focus on the experiences of African American authors and their relationship to food that seek to envision all the natural abundance of possibilities that food has to offer.

Essential Questions:

- How can cooperative community-led efforts based through the land inspire kinship?
- How do the seasons/natural cycles bring new opportunities for growth?
- What are the contrasts between urban and rural, modern and traditional?
- How can we see the formation of different communities in rural and urban contexts and how does this explain the contrast between the rural south and urban areas?

Readings:

Baszile, N. (2021). Ancestral Vibrations Guide to our Connections to the Land. In *We are each other's Harvest: Celebrating african american farmers, land, and legacy* (pp. 227–238). essay, HarperCollins.

Lewis, E. (1976). The taste of country cooking. *Alfred A. Knopf*. 1Read excerpts from pg. xi–50

Reese, A., & Cooper, D. (2021). Making Spaces Something Like Freedom. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 20(4), 450–459. Retrieved from <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/2024>

*Optional forms of engagement: Any episode of Queen Sugar which can be found on Hulu

Theme 2: Neoliberalism, Biopolitics and Relationality: Thinking Through Governmental Efforts to Inscribe Legible Kinship and Reproduction

Contributor: Sabrina K. Harris

What are the technologies of governance which regulate our bodies, our kinship, and our ways of thinking about (re)production? This section of the course explores the emergence of neoliberal and biopolitical regimes in shaping political, cultural, social, and economic modes of relation through ties of kinship often rendered marginal or aberrant by dominant discourses. How is the body and/or family made into a site where governmental power is enacted? This section consults a range of texts which place these forces in conversation: how does reclaiming the body, kinship, and reproduction offer an act or site of resistance to the neoliberal agenda? How is gender, sexuality, and race implicated in a necessarily capitalist political economy? Is there a way for the body to be reclaimed within such power structures, or is existing under a neoliberal regime a perpetual negotiation of humanity? This section draws upon a range of authors to explore how kinship and bodily autonomy are rendered (il)legitimate through the translation of the state into the classically liberal “private” domain of the family/household in the interest of crafting an acceptable class of citizens. The production of such forces is geared towards rendering the body, the family, and the process of reproduction within discourses that shape an idealized neoliberal subject. This section aims to probe such a process, beginning with Bakker’s exploration of the neoliberal paradox reliant upon presenting women’s domestic labor (and capacity for (re)production) as a natural extension of the labor economy. The regulatory force of the state in shaping family relations in the interest of neoliberal subjectivity is further explored in Crossley’s scholarship, which focuses on the promotion

of “troubled” families as aberrant subjects. This section then turns to LeBaron’s engagement with the realm of the political economy of the household as a site of neoliberalization of everyday life and its enclosure into market rationality. This section embraces Dahl’s exploration of queer kinship and biopolitics as a possible alternative to inscribing alternative modes of relation and reproduction outside of the hyper-rational subjectivity of heterosexual neoliberal reproduction. Finally, I turn to Judith Butler’s discussion of queer marriage and kinship relative to the ability of the state to legislate legible formations of kinship in relation to the law. Together, these texts gesture us towards thinking through the power of governmental and capitalist logics in dictating the boundaries of legible bodily and familial subjects and subjectivities.

Readings:

- Bakker, Isabella. 2003. “Neo-Liberal Governance and the Reprivatization of Social Reproduction: Social Provisioning and Shifting Gender Orders.” In *Power, Production and Social Reproduction: Human In/Security in the Global Political Economy*, edited by Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill, 66–82. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230522404_4.
- Butler, Judith. 2002. “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” *Differences* 13 (1): 14–44. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-13-1-14>.
- Crossley, Stephen. 2016. “‘Realising the (Troubled) Family’, ‘Crafting the Neoliberal State.’” *Families, Relationships and Societies* 5 (2): 263–79. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674315X14326465757666>.
- Dahl, Ulrika. 2020. “Precarious Labourers of Love: Queer Kinship, Reproductive Labour and Biopolitics.” In *Bodily Interventions and Intimate Labour*. Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526138576.00010>.
- LeBaron, Genevieve. 2010. “The Political Economy of the Household: Neoliberal Restructuring, Enclosures, and Daily Life.” *Review of International Political Economy* 17 (5): 889–912.

Theme 3: Indigenous Resistance- Resisting Ongoing Colonialism by Reclaiming Indigenous Kinship

Contributor: Marie-Lys Chambraud

In order to understand the link between kinship and contemporary society’s standards for family, one has to recognize the influence and impact the colonialism of Indigenous lands created. Indigenous societies have been recognized to govern themselves through modes of kinship and have suffered through attempts at erasing these ties. In this theme, we will analyze the state of resistance against settlers’ attempt to control the ways of living of Indigenous people; more particularly, their family values and relationality. We will conduct this section through the study of several texts investigating Indigenous societal governance and resistance in the US and in Australia. This survey of texts will claim on the one hand, through the analysis of colonial history, means of control of the Indigenous populations through Blood Quantum measures, the Indian child welfare act in the US and the dispossession of Aboriginal children taken from their families in Australia, the attempt at erasing kinship ties and ways of sovereignty amongst Indigenous nations. On the other hand, it will demonstrate that the survival of Indigenous families’ knowledge systems have supported the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty. At the end of this theme, students should be able to illustrate how Indigenous kinship narratives are tied to resistance against colonialism. They will also be able to conduct research and develop their writing skills.

Readings:

- Dudgeon, Patricia, and Abigail Bray. 2019. “Indigenous Relationality: Women, Kinship and the Law” *Genealogy* 3, no. 2: 23. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020023>
- Gross, Emma R. “Native American Family Continuity as Resistance: The Indian Child Welfare Act as Legitimation for an Effective Social Work Practice.” *Journal of Social Work* 3, no. 1 (April 2003): 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017303003001003>.
- Killsback, Leo Kevin. “A Nation of Families: Traditional Indigenous Kinship, the Foundation for Cheyenne Sovereignty.” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 15, no. 1 (March 2019): 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118822833>.

Schmidt, Ryan W. "American Indian Identity and Blood Quantum in the 21st Century: A Critical Review." *Journal of Anthropology*. Hindawi, January 15, 2012. <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/janthro/2011/549521/>.

Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

Theme 4: "What if?" Space, Time, and Kinship Mythologies: On Re-Writing the Family, Spatial Relationalities and Emergent Communities

Contributor: Leah Ramnath

In this theme, we explore the concepts of space and time within kinship relationalities. Kinship, juxtaposed from heteronormative nuclear family structures, is narratively located outside of space/time. Although the rhetorical implications imply a static forced-position, kinship here has had the potential to be a generative hub in which subjects of this undeniably enlivened world enable pioneers of world-building who can narrate their own origin stories. Within kinship networks, the inhabitants of these ecstatic worlds enable authentic forms of life having power to disarticulate space/time constraints. In the following readings, we will look at aesthetics of refusal that reveal space/time to be socially constructed categorical projections of a mythological and romanticized past. We will take up how an aesthetics of refusal is cultivated within kinship spaces and how these spaces allow for transcendence resulting in a mode of being enabling the capacity to pay attention. We start with Butler (2000) and Armstrong's (2017) work to follow the (theological) mythical figures of Antigone and Hagar, unpacking problematic paradoxes and violent relational hierarchy inherent in the normative family model. Then, we turn to Singh (2020), Muñoz (2019), and Baldwin (2021) to catalog the aesthetics of refusal and strategies of paying attention cultivated/ing through kinship relationalities toward a radical futurity where love, care, and an affirmation/insistence of life is foundational. The goal of this section is to wrest what has faded into the background of everyday life into the foreground; we are aiming to interrogate assumptions and question the normative discourses around sex, gender, ethnicity, race, and class centering kinship familial relations. Students will be able to identify and name the *dusty ass* narratives by which modern/contemporary society rely to preserve hierarchical social arrangements anchored in the past and projected onto the future.

Readings:

Butler, Judith. Promiscuous Obedience. In *Antigone's Claim : Kinship between Life and Death*, 57–82. The Wellek Library Lectures. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Armstrong, Amaryah. "Of Flesh and Spirit: Race, Reproduction, and Sexual Difference in the Turn to Paul," 126–141. *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 16, 2017.

Singh, Balbir K. "'No Pigs in Paradise': Speculative Materialism in the Spirit of Black Constellation." *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 36, 2020.

Muñoz, José E. "Just Like Heaven: Queer Utopian Art and the Aesthetic Dimension." In *Cruising utopia, 10th anniversary edition: The then and there of queer futurity*, 131–146. New York University Press. 2019.

Baldwin, Andrea. "Reading toward aspiration: A Black feminist shad(e)y theoretics and the politics of elsewhere and whatever." In *A Decolonial Black Feminist Theory of Reading and Shade: Feeling the University* (1st ed.), 122–151. Routledge, 2021.

Theme 5: Kinship and Temporality – How Queerness Clashes with Linear Timelines

Contributor: Vasilije Mesarovic

In this theme, we explore the ways in which traditional colonial heterosexual conceptions of kinship and family define a linear timeline that is followed by both individuals and families, and the ways in which models of kinship outside of those conceptions can leave those who live according to such models feeling unmoored from time, unable to access societally accepted models of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and maturity. Using several sociological studies of queer people's experiences of time, we will look at different ways queer people alternatively

try to fit into the temporal mold of heterosexual kinship, or carve out their own timelines entirely outside of that mold. Silva and Stockton cover the ways in which heteronormative temporalities disrupt or prevent queer childhood and adolescence. Jaffe and Taylor provide analyses of queer adulthoods, or lack thereof, resulting from the denial of traditional heteronormative milestones such as marriage and having children. Finally, Boellstorff looks to conceptions of time originating outside of colonial western cultures to find potential radical alternatives to “Straight time”. The goals of this theme are twofold: First, in tandem with the larger themes of this syllabus, to demonstrate the ways in which even our conceptions of something as basic as time are tied up in a messy tangle with our conceptions of kinship, and second, to use the example of queerness to show how this can be extremely harmful to anyone who does not fit into those conceptions.

Note: this theme has strong links to readings from themes 2 and 3 and builds on them, and should probably be taught after those themes. It is also intended to be taught in such a way that theme 6 can build on it in turn, or this theme can build on theme 6 depending on teaching order, with relatively minor alterations.

Readings:

- Boellstorff, Tom. 2007. “When Marriage Falls: Queer Coincidences in Straight Time.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2–3 (2007). Duke University Press.
- Jaffe, Sara. 2018. *Queer Time: The Alternative to “Adulthood”*. JSTOR Daily. <https://daily.jstor.org/queer-time-the-alternative-to-adulthood/>
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. 2009. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. London: Duke University Press.
- Silva, Jennifer M. 2012. “Constructing Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (August 2012). American Sociological Association.
- Taylor, Jodie. 2010. “Queer Temporalities and the Significance of “Music Scene” Participation in the Social Identities of Middle-aged Queers.” *Sociology*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (October 2010). Sage Publications, Ltd.

Theme 6: Contagion, Contact, Intimacy

Contributor: Jack Bernardi

Disease has long had a privileged role in the self-mythologization of societies, emphasizing the promise and threat of cohabitation with human and nonhuman organisms alike. Looking at the cultural history of pathogens, one finds a particular concern for the figure of the stranger-as-carrier, the outsider who brings danger along with them. As Priscilla Wald notes in her account of the ‘outbreak narrative’, the carrier also represents a basic problem of self-knowledge; like the sinner, the ‘superspreader’ ‘knows not what they do’. And yet, like Oedipus searching for the source of the plague on his city, it may turn out that we ourselves, the familiar and not the strange, is the cause of our dilemma. Focusing on the history of HIV/AIDS and its popular response in the US and UK, this unit considers how discourse on disease and the threat of contamination shape and are shaped by anxieties over the perennial outsiders, the foreigner and homosexual. Synonymous with disease itself, the figure of the carrier represents not only a biological hazard but a cultural one, threatening to ‘infect’ society with their unwanted way of life. Turning farther back in time, it is clear that the sexual and racial anxieties surrounding HIV/AIDS are by no means unprecedented, animating the hygiene and sanitation movements which preceded the modern World Health Organization. Consequently, this unit interrogates why and how sexual intimacy presents a certain kind of conceptual and practical problem for sovereignty and the eternally-unfinished project of modernity.

Readings:

- Bersani, Leo. “Is the Rectum a Grave?”, in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And other essays*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Watney, Simon. *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids, and the Media*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Chapter 1 (“Sex, diversity and disease”) and Chapter 2 (“Infectious desires”)

Shah, Nayan. *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*. University of California Press, 2001.

Wald, Priscilla. *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Duke University Press, 2008. Introduction and Chapter 5 (“The Columbus of AIDS: The Invention of ‘Patient Zero’”)

Theme 7: Illegible Kinship; Building, Destroying & Choosing Family & Queering Roles

Contributor: Casey Anne Brimmer

Section Goals: Complicate understandings of legible and illegible kinship in terms of how familial roles are constructed, assigned, and carried out.

Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to call someone a brother, sister, or sibling in a movement as is seen in Lorde and *Queers Read This!*
- In what ways are familial roles static and in what ways are they flexible or unstable?
- How does the (in)flexibility of roles in familial- or kinship-based relations deconstruct or construct kinship as legible or illegible?

The following texts reimagine, reinvent, reorganize constructions of family and kin illegible in the queerness of identities intersecting as equality–nevermind equity–evades those multiply marginalized by systemic powers. Lorde (2011) reminds other feminists that ties of feminist sisterhood should not be cut by her existence as a Black woman. Pineau (2000) looks at the shifting of roles from being nursed by her mother, to nursing her mother and mothering her nursing infant. *Ballot Measure 9* by Collective Eye Films (1995) examines the dangers of all marriages not being legally recognizable as families to begin with. Piepna-Samarasinha (2018) restructures queer kinship to include the carework within her disabled communities at the intersection of queerness and disability justice. Finally, *Queers Read This*, originally published as a zine in 1990 and published to the Queer Zine Archive online in 2009, reimagines siblings in a way that asks other Queers to do better by the multiply marginalized—a call to unite queer folks against cisheterosexism and homophobia that Lorde’s work names.

Readings:

Lorde, Audre. “I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities.” Essay. In *I Am Your Sister* Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde, edited by Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta B Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 57–63. Oxford University Press Inc, 2011.

Pineau, Elyse. “Nursing Motherand Articulating Absence.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2000): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930009366280>.

Ballot Measure 9. Kanopy. United States: Collective Eye Films, 1995. <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/245171?vp=vt>.

Pineau, Elyse. “Nursing Motherand Articulating Absence.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2000): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930009366280>.

“Zine: *Queers Read This!*” QZAP, 2009. https://archive.qzap.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/184.

Theme 8: Bra and Panty Mas: Afrocentric Origins of Gender Expansiveness and Its Influence on Caribbean Masking and Masquerade Traditions

Contributor: Leslie Robertson Foncette

In this section we explore artifacts of West African and Caribbean masquerade and festival culture that combine rhetoric and practice to transcend the gender binary. We look at the links between West African masquerade and carnival characters and, from our viewpoint as Westernized researchers, we challenge Eurocentric ideas about immutable gender binaries in West African culture and carnival culture.

There are numerous elements of Trinidad and Tobago carnival, Brazilian carnival, and West African masquerade, eg. in the Yoruba festival of Gelede, and masquerades of the Mende people that are worn or portrayed by men but depict women. The intentions vary, sometimes as a form of honoring women, sometimes due to religious restrictions, and sometimes because the culture is not indebted to the same restrictions of gender commonly perpetrated in Western European culture.

In the traditions of Trinidad and Tobago carnival, there are numerous examples of masquerade depicting women but traditionally portrayed by men, and there is also the practice of men dressing as women, adorning themselves not in the fanciful garb of carnival characters, but in the quotidian garb of womanhood – men dressing as women, in stuffed bras with lipstick and ladies underpants, or in a house dress or “nightie” with no attempt to hide male features. Often misunderstood by outside cultures, this male as female character is not new to the African Diaspora. First we explore the contexts of women’s representation in post-colonial Trinbagonian society then we discuss the historical contexts of portrayals such as the the Dame Lorraine, the pis-en-lit, and “bra and panty mas” of jouvert – the pre-dawn festival at the opening of carnival. Then we explore the arguments around gender portrayals in carnival.

Readings:

- Edmondson, Belinda. “Public spectacles: Caribbean women and the politics of public performance.” *Small Axe* 7, no. 1 (2003): 1–16.
- Liverpool, Hollis. 2001. *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad & Tobago, 1763–1962*, pp 63–87.
- Danet, Brenda. “Text as mask: gender, play and performance.” *Cybersociety* 2 (1998): 129–158.
- Gill, Lyndon, K. 2018. *Inheriting the Mask: A History of Parody in Trinidad’s Carnival*. In *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* pp 31–50.
- Gill, Lyndon, K. 2018. *Peter Minshall’s Sacred Heart and the Erotic Art of Play*. In *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* pp 51–77.
- Gill, Lyndon, K. 2018. *Echoes of an Utterance: A History of Gender Play in Calypso*. In *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* pp 87–106.
- Henry, Frances and Jeff Henry. 2020. *Stories of Resistance and Oppression*. In Frances Henry and Dwaine Plaza eds, *Carnival Is Woman: Feminism and Performance in Caribbean Mas*, pp 43–56.
- *For more info on women in Carnival see:
- Plaza, Dwaine and Jan DeCosmo. 2020. *Women and the De-Africanization of Trinidad Carnival: From Jamette to Bikini Beads and Feathers*. In Frances Henry and Dwaine Plaza eds, *Carnival Is Woman: Feminism and Performance in Caribbean Mas*, pp 21–42.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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